

April/May Farm & Market Report

4/16/20

COMMISSIONER'S COLUMN

Deputy's Dialogue

FOREFRONT

- [Energy News](#)
- [APR Updates](#)
- [Three Options to Connect Farmers and Products \(Buyers and Sellers\)](#)
- [Apiary Program](#)
- [Urban Agriculture Program FY2021 RFR - Deadline Extended til June 12th](#)
- [File Taxes. Help Animals. Tax Deadline Extended to July 15th](#)
- [Massachusetts Building – One day Opportunities to Exhibit at the Big E](#)
- [UMass Extension Introduces InsectXaminer](#)
- [Update on SBA Emergency Loan Programs](#)
- [Organic Producer Survey](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS/WORKSHOPS

USDA NEWS

- [DHS and USDA Move to Protect American Farmers and Ensure Continued Flow of America's Food Supply](#)
- [RMA Offering Remote Assistance and Authorizing Additional Flexibility for Producers](#)
- [Agricultural Conservation Easement Program \(ACEP\)](#)

CLASSIFIED

COMMISSIONER'S COLUMN



Greetings, Mass. Agriculture and all its friends,

It's good to "talk" to you again. I hope you are taking all measures you can to stay safe during this unprecedented time.

AS MDAR'S mission is to keep the food supply safe and secure, and keep MA Ag economically and environmentally sound, let me please tell you some of the things we are doing in response to COVID-19.

To meet that mission, we need to address two fundamental matters. We need to provide guidance and resources to you, and we need to promote MA Ag as a viable and desirable alternative to supermarkets and grocery stores.

Through our Agricultural Markets Division, we have created two excellent comprehensive online efforts at the website to address those needs. Our [COVID-19 Resources for Agriculture](#) area includes a list of resources to keep our agricultural community informed and aware of relevant policies and best practices. There you will find official government documents including several guidance Bulletins about particular agricultural practices along with a series of resource links that address Food Safety, Farmers' Markets, Animal Health, Farm Labor, Financial Resources and Funding, Mental Health Resources and more.

We are constantly adding to the list of Bulletins as we become aware of issues that require guidance. MDAR's Divisions are the original authors of these drafts, which like all agencies' guidance, appropriately receives review to insure there is consistency with the Administration's overall response strategy. As of today there are ten Bulletins posted, several under review, and others under development. Please check the page regularly for updates.

The above efforts are geared toward helping our producers produce. Ag Markets' parallel effort is to inform the consuming public how it may source and purchase that production. That is done by means of our [COVID-19: How and Where to Buy Local](#) page.

At the consumer facing page, we have consolidated access to the frequently updated MassGrown Map, curbside and delivery options, regional efforts (largely coordinated by the regional Buy Local organizations), and other resources aimed at consumers.

Speaking of the Buy Local organizations, there are ten of them throughout the state. A significant part of each organization's funding comes through an annual budgetary appropriation administered by MDAR.

That means MDAR and the Buy Locals have a long history of working closely together to promote consumer purchasing of Ag products. Because of that special long standing relationship, and the situation we are all in, I find it appropriate to feature them in today's column.

I offered each organization some space here to briefly offer whatever message they'd like to provide. Some have written about their COVID-19 work; others have chosen to discuss their core missions. In any event, I hope you consider taking a close look at your regional Buy Local, to both see how it may help you, and how you may help it, all with the goal of getting MA Ag products to consumers.

So with no further introduction, here's what they have to say in their own words:

[Berkshire Grown](#) is the leading advocate for agriculture in the Berkshires. We support farmers with workshops, networking events, technical assistance, and winter farmers markets, and the annually-published *Guide to Local Food and Farms*. We create and strengthen connections between farmers, chefs and community members. In response to COVID-19 we have partnered with several other local non-profits and raised funds to purchase local produce, milk and eggs from our farmers, and we donate them to food pantries and low-income families in the Berkshires. Through social media, stories placed in the press, and a new [SHOP LOCAL NOW](#) page on our website, we are connecting the community to Berkshire farm stands, home delivery options, online ordering, and more.

The mission of [Buy Fresh Buy Local Cape Cod](#) is simple: connect people with locally-grown land and sea products. Through outreach and marketing, BFBL makes it easy for consumers to find and buy fresh, local food. Despite ongoing concerns and challenges of the Covid-19 virus, our local farmers, markets, seafood harvesters, and restaurants have come together and have adapted remarkably to provide healthy, local food options to members of the community during this crisis.

Now more than ever, our local food providers are demonstrating their value, and BFBLLC will continue to support our local food economy and the dedication to serving our communities' local, healthy, fresh foods. We have created a Cape Cod Covid-19 Farm + Food Guide to provide the public with resources on farms, markets, CSA's, retail, and seafood businesses operating during the crisis. Download to your phone or computer to print out. This will be updated weekly!

[Central Mass Grown](#) is providing a platform for farmers, food producers and retailers to assure consumers that food scarcity is not an issue within their local food system. Many growers have quickly adapted their programs to provide roadside pickup and delivery programs. Within Central MA, a listing of these providers can be found right on our website. If you are a food producer in Worcester County please visit the Covid-19 resource page at www.centralmassgrown.org, and complete the Google form to list your business information on our website. Also, Central Mass Grown would like to hear from the Farmers Market Managers across the county about the support we can provide to you in order to comply with social distancing recommendations at your market. Please email us at info@centralmassgrown.org.

[CISA](#) (Franklin, Hampden, and Hampshire Counties) has been busy updating our resources so people know where and how they can [access local food during the pandemic](#). We have also been researching and [compiling information to help farmers and farmers' markets](#) adjust to changing health and safety requirements, market shifts, etc. and providing support for those farmers and farmers' markets who need more help. We raised money to reopen our [Emergency Farm Fund](#), making \$300K, in no-interest loans, available to farms in Franklin, Hampden, and Hampshire counties, and have been advocating for farms, at the state and federal level, to get the support they need to weather this crisis.

[Island Grown Initiative's](#) mission is to build a regenerative and equitable food system on Martha's Vineyard. We work to increase local food production with minimal impact on our ecosystems. We embrace farming practices that increase biodiversity, enrich soils and improve watersheds, while increasing yields, resilience to climate instability and the vitality of our farming community. Expanding access to healthy food for all Islanders is more important than ever. Reducing and redirecting food waste is also critical. We rescue produce from fields and groceries to feed people and animals. What can't be redirected is collected and composted to enrich our soils.

[Northeast Harvest](#) is proud to represent Essex and Middlesex counties with the mission to connect the farmers and farmers Markets with the consumers. Northeast Harvest supports our farmers by offering workshops in many interests, such as marketing, financial, and education. Each year we offer PACE credits to farmers so that they may continue their licensing requirements. Northeast Harvest markets our farms and farmers' markets by producing a Local Food Guide at no cost to the farmer and distributes the guides throughout the region. We work in collaboration with many other organizations as well as individual growers and agricultural producers to highlight the number and variety of farms and food products that are available in northeastern Massachusetts.

[SEMAP](#) – the Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership – is a community non-profit, established in 1998, working to support our region's farms, preserving and expanding access to sustainable local food in Bristol, Norfolk and Plymouth. SEMAP works to strengthen our region's farms by facilitating educational workshops and conferences, hosting networking events, and offering technical assistance and grant funding for farmers and local food producers, in addition to providing local consumers with opportunities to purchase local agricultural products and to find and connect with their local farms.

The [Sustainable Business Network of Massachusetts'](#) Boston Local Food Program plays a central role in connecting Massachusetts farms to consumers and food buyers in the Greater Boston area. Through the Boston Local Food Festival and our state-wide Eat Local Month campaign, our work not only connects farmers to consumers, but also educates the general public about the benefits of supporting local agriculture and local fisheries. SBN also plays a critical role in supporting our local food system by educating food producers and connecting institutional food buyers with food producers through our Local Food & Specialty Crop Trade Show.

[Sustainable CAPE](#) continues our focus on local food while teaching about the health of our bodies, community and environment. The recent demand for local food has spurred an expansion of our website to better connect farmers and fisherman selling directly to customers. We've revamped our school garden programs, continuing to employ our Farmer/Educators as they plant production gardens and teach online, thereby creating as much food as possible for school families. We are purchasing local food, cooking scratch-made meals and delivering them to veterans' doorsteps. This program, Project Gratitude, provides healthful food and (distant!) social connection while supporting both the physical and emotional health of our veteran population. Increased demand then strengthens our farmers' sales, local food system and economy.

The mission of [Sustainable Nantucket](#) is: Cultivating, Educating, and Promoting environmentally responsible choices...making a big difference on a small island. This mission is reflected in our four programs: Farm to School, Farmers and Artisans Market, Nantucket Grown and the Community Farm Institute. In these uncertain times we are reexamining what our commitment to local agriculture and our ecosystem means and are adapting our programs as needed. Farmers on our Community Farm, for example, began their growing season early to get food in the ground for the community. Our Farm to School program has also used the Joyce N. Furman Youth Garden as a place to grow as many edible crops as possible in addition to distributing seed planting kits to families to encourage home or "Victory" Gardens. Additionally, our Farm to School Manager has been creating YouTube videos with garden related activities for children to do at home. From our family to yours, we wish you health and safety in these uncertain times.

These organizations exist to assist MA Ag! Please consider if there is value for you to begin a relationship with the one in your region, or expand on the one you have.

Thank you, Buy Locals!

Moving on, I'd like to tell you about an unexpected way that MDAR directly became involved in the Commonwealth's COVID-19 Public Health activities.

Late Sunday 4/5, MDAR was notified that the Big E grounds was selected to serve as a Coronavirus testing site and be fully operational at 7 AM Thursday 4/9. The Mass. Building (which MDAR has managed for one hundred years) was selected to serve as the briefing/break/meal area for the testing team and volunteers.

Working with our partners at The Big E, Exec. Off. of Public Safety, the State Fire Marshall, Massachusetts Department of Fire Services, Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance, and our home team (Belkis Roman of EEA Facilities, and most of all MDAR's boots on the ground, Mass. Building Mgr. Fran Pearson), the building was de-winterized; it has no heating service except in the small upstairs office-water and services restored, temporary heat deployed, everything that was packed away either restored where needed or moved



out of the way, and the Building was ready to roll for a dry run Wednesday and full operations Thursday!

Congratulations and thank you to Fran, Belkis, and all our partners for this amazingly quick restoration of building services. MDAR is honored to have the opportunity to support the Mission and make the Building available to some of our frontline heroes!

Before I move on to feature some “routine activities”, I’d like to acknowledge the people of MDAR. Like everyone else, our personal and professional worlds have been disrupted in an unprecedented manner. Our offices were last open on Friday, March 13; our senior team (Division managers, Fiscal, Legal, and my office) spent a very, very active weekend the next two days moving the department toward remote operations.

We made that happen, and since March 16, we have been operating remotely. There has been a constant stream of questions and challenges. Though many of our operations are electronic, not all are, and making them function has been challenging.

An example to which many can relate is simply receiving the US Mail. I won’t go into detail, but Plan A didn’t work, and now we are into a modified Plan B that involves the “MDAR Pony Express” of socially distant handoffs all over the state.

Our team has been extremely flexible, and has found ways to conduct business from this remote work model, and I’m very grateful to them for their creative methods to get the work done. I’m also extremely proud of them.

There are a lot of phone calls in the Coronavirus world: individual calls, conference calls, and video calls (have to dress up a little for those) to the point I’m hoarse at the end of most days. We are speaking with stakeholders on a regular basis, along with regular calls with Secretary Theoharides and her team at EEA, and regular senior staff calls. Nationally we are on weekly calls with our national association, USDA, and the White House among others as we try to navigate the issue.

We are anxiously waiting for guidance from USDA on how it intends to manage the \$9.5B it received for the Secretary’s relief operations. In the last week I have signed onto letters from our northeastern regional association to Secretary Perdue with our suggestions about how that \$9.5B should be distributed, and also about critical issues in the Dairy industry.

As I begin to wrap this up, I want to mention that among “routine” business we have closed on two Agricultural Preservation Restriction program acquisitions since we’ve gone remote: the 925th and 926th acquisitions of some of the best farmland in the state. (One required a socially distant meeting in a Framingham parking lot so I could have my signature notarized.) #925 was a second farm owned by the Food Bank of Western MA (FBWM). The property is being leased to two farmers, and like the FBWM’s original farm, lease payments are made with a portion of the harvest, not with cash. FBWM then incorporates that produce into its food distribution operation. It’s a great story and you can learn about it [here](#).

In closing, I want to thank all of you for the universally respectful and kind conversations we’ve had with folks about a variety of tricky topics. We understand how difficult it is for everyone to get things done, the unpredictable risks folks are facing, and the stress with which everyone is contending.

But through all that MA Ag is rising to the challenge! New creative methods of selling: online, curbside, no contact, aggregated deliveries, etc. have quickly been established, and the buying public is happily accepting them.

As I said in my Ag Day message last month, “In a world that’s full of anxiety, it’s you who are the connection to the natural order. It’s you who make the food, grow the plants, care for the bees, grow the fin and shellfish, and produce the timber that Americans just take for granted will be there whenever they want to buy them and in any quantity. All of a sudden people are starting to think about how that happens. So employing the lemonade from a (huge and awful) lemon analogy, this is an admittedly odd opportunity to demonstrate and remind our residents of all the great things you do and the challenges you overcome pretty much every day to produce your products.

MA Ag has been through a lot since it began in the 1600’s: wars, all kinds of disasters, economic downturns, and yes, also the 1918 Influenza Pandemic-and it’s gotten through all of them, just like it’s going to get through this one. There is no one more resilient, no more creative problem solver, no harder worker, and no better steward of the working landscape than the Massachusetts Farmer!”

We are going to get through this, folks! I promise the people of MDAR will do everything we can to keep the food supply safe and secure, and keep MA Ag economically and environmentally sound. That’s largely accomplished by us supporting you! I can’t guarantee all decisions will be to everyone’s liking on every matter as public health is paramount, but much of what you do is considered essential, and those essential activities (essentially agricultural production) are where we are focusing our efforts.

Stay safe, be well,



John Lebeaux

Deputy’s Dialogue

By Ashley Randle

“When everything is uncertain, everything that is important becomes clear.” -Dr. Caroline Leaf

When I penned my last F&M Report column, I was anxiously anticipating farm tours, festivals, pancake breakfasts, and seeing family, friends, and farmers at events this spring. In a matter of weeks since publication, our lives have dramatically changed. There is no business as usual for our farmers and agricultural community. The impacts have reverberated across the state and country, as traditional marketing channels evaporated overnight, including schools, institutions, and restaurants. At the same time, consumers recognized that Massachusetts farmers and our agricultural producers are indeed #essential.

The agricultural industry has been impacted by the impacts of the coronavirus and are experiencing disruptions in their processing facilities and labor shortages, all while battling a changing climate and growing conditions. Despite these challenges, the farming community remains resilient and is finding ways to bring their products to a market for consumers (at a safe social distance, of course). Our farmers have adapted to the guidance provided by the Governor regarding gatherings, on-site meal service, and social distancing; while adhering to the health recommendations from the CDC and MA Department of Public Health as they are updated on an almost daily basis.

From farm to fork, the Massachusetts agriculture industry has risen to the challenge of historic food demand created by COVID-19. We have witnessed our farmers, food banks, and industry partners working to adapt and be nimble to a changing marketplace and way of doing business. Farmers and food suppliers are maneuvering to meet the shifting demand, while regulators try to ease the logistical headaches that come with rewiring the food distribution network. From curbside pick-up options to home delivery to retail farm stands and farmers' markets, the industry has implemented social distancing practices, sanitation and hygiene protocols, worker safety guidelines, and worked tirelessly to bring food to consumers' tables.

We're also conscious of the fact that our state's most vulnerable citizens are at risk due to the increased demand placed on food banks and meal assistance programs. The Food Bank Coalition of Massachusetts (FBCMA), which is comprised of The Greater Boston Food Bank (GBFB), the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, the Merrimack Valley Food Bank and the Worcester County Food Bank, provides food for 986 emergency hunger-relief organizations to feed about 600,000 citizens in need across the Commonwealth. MDAR also partners with the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) to implement the Massachusetts Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) – a matching program that provides a dollar for dollar match to SNAP participants when they buy fruits and vegetables from participating farmers. With many individuals facing unemployment, children now out of school and eating more meals at home, and with decreased expendable income; the pressures on the food banks have increased dramatically and, in some cases, demand has tripled. We are aware of these challenges and are in constant communications with the food banks, DTA, legislators, and partners across the food system to make sure food is available to those most in need. This will not be a short-term solution, but rather, a long-term conversation about how to address food insecurity and create a shared, sustainable model.

At the Department we continue to conduct weekly calls with industry stakeholders to provide updates, share information and access resources. These calls have allowed us to still connect, whereas meeting in person was once an activity we took for granted. The importance of collaboration is more critical and evident now than ever before, as groups are stepping up to the plate to serve the immediate needs of farmers, organizations, and consumers. Above all, the friendships and partnerships within our agricultural community have continued to grow and become even stronger. While I've always been proud of how our farmers and industry respond in times of adversity, I have simply been overwhelmed with appreciation and admiration for how all of you have responded to this unprecedented challenge.

My hope and intent are that consumers continue to support their local farms and businesses not only during times of crisis and uncertainty, but into the future and throughout the year. Building a strong, resilient food system will undoubtedly look different after COVID-19, and continuing to address food insecurity, climate change, and the infrastructure needed to incubate and grow our food economy will remain priorities. While we have moved from triage mode (for the most part) to maintenance of Department programming and operations, the long-term impacts from this harrowing virus will be felt for years to come across MDAR and our state's agricultural sector. I'm confident however, that we will come out stronger on the other side and better prepared because of our collective actions.

I feel incredibly grateful to serve the state and each of you during this unprecedented time. The thoughtful, compassionate, and dynamic leadership of Governor Baker and Lieutenant Governor Polito have set an example for other states across the country. This administration has positioned Massachusetts to rise to the challenge of battling COVID-19 and come out stronger on the other side. The coronavirus does not care what your political affiliation is, and bipartisanship is needed now more than ever. In addition to the Governor and LG, Secretary Theoharides and the entire Secretariat at Energy and Environmental Affairs have provided tireless support and guidance to MDAR and our sister agencies. We are fortunate to be partners in identifying the immediate and long-term needs of the agricultural community and know that the Secretary and her team are advancing our concerns to find timely and practical solutions. I am also fortunate to work alongside Commissioner Lebeaux and our dedicated team at MDAR. From adapting to a remote workstyle in a matter of a few days to continuing our

daily operations in a new format, our team has risen to the challenge and made me even more proud to call them my colleagues and friends.

The news around COVID-19 is constantly changing, as are the needs of our communities. What remains a constant is that our farmers will continue to grow high-quality crops, provide for their livestock, produce nutritious food for our state's most vulnerable citizens... Mother Nature doesn't wait for a cure, a vaccine, or a full recovery. In fact, Mother Nature takes a firm stance that farming should be business as usual and remain a 24/7/365 operation. And we at MDAR will continue to provide the support and resources to ensure that farms remain viable and sustainable now and for years to come.

Thank you to all of you for your continued support, efforts to support the agricultural community, and heroism of the Commonwealth's men and women on the front lines to combat COVID-19 including our farmers. Rest assured that when the time is right, a strong cup of coffee with a friend, a hug, and a smiling face in person will be cherished by all. Until then, I look forward to connecting with you all by virtual means, through phone calls, by writing cards, and/or an email just to say "Hello, and I'm here for you."

Wishing you and your families good health, wellness, and optimism for better days ahead.

Locally grown and proud,
Ashley

When this is over,
May we never again
Take for granted
A handshake with a stranger
Full shelves at the store
Chatting with a neighbor
A crowded theatre
A full church pew
Friday night out
A routine checkup
The morning school rush
Coffee with a friend
The stadium roaring
Each deep breath
A boring Tuesday
Life itself.
When this ends,
May we find that we have become more like the people we wanted to be,
We were called to be,

we hoped to be,
And may we stay that way — better for each other because of that worst.”

-Laura Kelly Fanucci

FOREFRONT

Energy News

MDAR's New Climate Smart Agriculture Program (CSAP)

Open Application Period for MDAR Environmental, Energy, and Produce Safety Grants - **Deadline Extended to June 19, 2020**

MDAR is now accepting applications from agricultural operations who wish to participate in the Department's produce safety, energy, and environmental grant programs. Grants are available to help agricultural operations make farm improvements that enhance their economic viability, help prevent negative impacts to environmental resources, adapt and mitigate climate change, improve energy efficiency, adopt renewable energy, and improve on-farm produce safety.

****New for Fiscal Year '21** is the Climate Smart Agriculture Program that links MDAR's water, energy and climate grants together into one application. This includes the Agricultural Climate Resiliency & Efficiencies (ACRE) Program, the Agricultural Environmental Enhancement Program (AEEP), and the Agricultural Energy Grant Program (ENER). By bringing these three grants under one program, MDAR is seeking to simplify the application process for applicants. This program continues the goals of the three individual grants by implementing projects that help the agricultural sector adapt to climate change, mitigate climate change, reducing or preventing impacts to natural resources that may result from agricultural practices, and that improve energy efficiency and facilitate adoption of alternative clean energy technologies.

The CSAP application deadline has been extended from Friday, May 8, 2020 to Friday, June 19, 2020. Applications must be received by the Department no later than 4:00 pm on Friday, June 19th. Applications must be sent by mail or hand delivered to: Laura J. Maul, Program Coordinator, MDAR, 251 Causeway Street, Suite 500, Boston, MA 02114 - **Email and faxes not accepted**.

Please visit the CSAP website for more information and a copy of the application: www.mass.gov/how-to/how-to-apply-to-the-climate-smart-agriculture-program

For more information contact Laura Maul, 617-626-1739, Laura.Maul@mass.gov or Gerry Palano, 617-626-1706, Gerald.Palano@mass.gov.

Below are brief descriptions of each program. For more information (including applications) please visit the program's website. Climate Smart Agriculture Program (CSAP) - Reimbursement grant program that links three of MDAR's grant programs into one application. This includes:

Agricultural Climate Resiliency & Efficiencies (ACRE) Program - Reimbursement grant program that funds the implementation of projects that help the agricultural sector adapt to climate change, mitigate climate change, and improve economic resiliency.

Agricultural Environmental Enhancement Program (AEEP) - Reimbursement grant program that funds materials and labor for conservation practices that mitigate or prevent negative impacts to the state's natural resources that may result from agricultural practices. Practices funded include those that prevent direct impacts on water quality, ensure efficient use of water, and address agricultural impacts on air quality.

Agricultural Energy Program (ENER) - Reimbursement grant program that funds agricultural energy projects in an effort to improve energy efficiency and the adoption of alternative energy by Massachusetts farms. The goal of the program is that farms can become more sustainable and the Commonwealth can maximize the environmental and economic benefits from these technologies.

The Program is broken into two categories: Part I: Climate Adaptation & Mitigation and Part II: Energy Efficiency & Renewable Projects.

Applicants are eligible to apply for consideration under both categories or a single category.

Mid-Fiscal Year 2020 Agricultural Energy Grant FY2020 (ENER)

MDAR was pleased to have received 45 applications with total grant requests just shy of \$2 million for our Mid-Fiscal Year 2020 AgEnergy Grant. Final reviews and approvals are being made and all applicants will be contacted regarding their status. As you recall, this Department grant program was made possible by recent MA Legislation as part of the MA Supplemental Budget.

MDAR's MA Farm Energy Program (MFEP) - Energy Audits - Technical Assistance – Be Prepared: Energy Grant Season A-Coming - Now is a BUSY time!

Energy Audits - MDAR's Massachusetts Farm Energy Program (MFEP) has funds to help farms cover audits, energy efficient projects, and select renewable energy projects.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Now is the time to have a technical assessment completed for any energy project you are considering in preparation for upcoming energy grants! You will need a technical assessment to file an energy grant application whether with MDAR or USDA. So start planning now; if you wait until applications come out you may not be able to have one scheduled in time! Remember our MFEP pays 75% of the technical assessment, first come, first served. Our MFEP is providing tele-assessments during this trying time.

Contact MFEP now for more information through the Center for EcoTechnology (CET), our partner carrying out the MFEP. 413-727-3090, info@massfarmenergy.com, or visit www.massfarmenergy.com, submit a *Request Form*, and then you will be contacted.

APR Updates

New APR Program Guide Now Online

As part of MDAR's ongoing efforts to increase communication and transparency the Department has released a new APR Program Guide, available for download at our [website here](#). This handbook for farmland preservation in Massachusetts describes the APR process from application to stewardship to transfer and sale. We hope the guide will provide landowners and the public with a clearer understanding of this important program and how it operates. Special thanks to Jen Boudrie, APR Outreach Consultant, for her hard work in putting together this document.

MDAR Seeks Input Regarding Agritourism Activities

The APR Program invites you to answer a quick survey (less than 5 minutes) about non-agricultural activities and how important they are to your agricultural operation: www.surveymonkey.com/r/LT72H99

Your feedback on this critical issue is timely and valued, as the APR Program is currently reviewing its Special Permit guidance. Survey responses will be collected until May 18, 2020. Thank you in advance for your participation.

193-ACRE Farm Protected to Ensure Local Food Security When We Need It Most

A partnership project by The Food Bank of Western Mass., Kestrel Land Trust, MDAR, and Town of Hadley and Amherst.

A 193-acre farm in North Hadley and North Amherst has been completely conserved for the benefit of the community—the culmination of a multi-year project led by Kestrel Land Trust with the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, Town of Hadley, Town of Amherst, and The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts to permanently protect land from sprawling development, protect and create a community farm, support private farmland conservation, and expand public conservation area and trails. [Complete release here.](#)

[Top](#)

Three Options to Connect Farmers and Products (Buyers and Sellers)

Matching CSAs and Farmstands with Value Added Food Businesses

With the increased public demand for CSAs, MDAR is launching a pilot project to match CSA farms with additional crops and products. As a CSA farmer or farmstand operator, have you thought about expanding your offerings with other crops or value added products? Or are you a value added producer or farmer looking for alternative marketing outlets for your products? If so, [MDAR's CSA-Producer Match Spreadsheet](#) can help you match up your needs with other value-added producers or food businesses.

We encourage businesses to fill out the CSA market match spreadsheet. The spreadsheet has tabs at the bottom, “CSA Farmers Seeking Products”, “Value added Producers Seeking CSA Partners”. We will keep the link live as a bulletin board, so you may come back for updated listings and posts.

Questions, contact Richard.LeBlanc@mass.gov or Rebecca.Davidson@mass.gov.

Matching Needs + Surplus

[Farm to Institution New England](#) (FINE) has also created a spreadsheet that matches up gaps and surplus in the New England institutional food system. They welcome anyone to add, view or contact others on the list directly. Examples of listings may include:

- Those with a surplus of food that need a home (e.g. meat, seafood, vegetables, dairy, processed foods)
- Those looking for local food to serve to displaced constituents
- Those with a need for extra hands at their facilities (e.g. milkers, kitchen staff, drivers)

- I nose looking for job opportunities after their institution has closed or reduced labor
- Those with additional storage space for food that needs to be preserved

Post your information on [FINE's spreadsheet here](#).

Farmers Markets Seek Vendors

MDAR posts an updated list of new and existing farmers markets looking for vendors here: www.mass.gov/media/1387246/download (Bookmark this link as it is updated often). The contacts for all the markets are posted [here](#). MassGrown map of farmers markets [here](#).

Apiary Program

Get the New England Honey Bee Update by joining New England states Apiary Inspectors of America members to learn about the latest regional seasonal activity, Coronavirus (COVID-19), and honey bee health updates for our area on **Friday, April 17th from 2-4pm**. Come prepared with questions to ask the inspectors. Join Zoom Meeting ID: 306 878 3894 - <https://umass-amherst.zoom.us/j/3068783894>, One tap mobile: +1-646-876-9923, 3068783894 #.

Please participate in the [BEE AWARE: The 2019-2020 Massachusetts Honey Bee Health Survey](#).

Seeking Compensation for Colony Losses? Check out the recently updated [USDA ELAP \(Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honey Bees and Farm-Raised Fish Program\)](#) that provides financial support. Contact your [local FSA office](#) to get more information.

Check out the NE IPM Center [Varroa Mite IPM: Four-Part Webinar Series for a Healthy Hive in 2020](#). The final webinar will be Monday, April 20th from 1-2:30pm. Previous recordings are available as well.

The USDA Beltsville Bee Lab is currently not accepting samples. Check [website](#) to get updated information.

330 CMR 8.00: Apiary Inspection Regulations Public Hearings originally scheduled for April 8th and April 16th have been Postponed to later dates. We will be in touch regarding the updated dates and locations as soon as possible.

COVID Bulletin regarding Honey Bee Colony Health Inspections - www.mass.gov/doc/mdar-bulletin-honey-beecolony-health-inspections/download

Apiary Program link here: www.mass.gov/apiary-program-honey-bees. Questions, bees@mass.gov.

Urban Agriculture Program FY2021 RFR - Deadline Extended til June 12th

The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources ("MDAR") seeks proposals for funding projects that will advance commercial urban food production in the Commonwealth.

[MDAR's Urban Agriculture Program](#) is seeking to award grants statewide to promote strategies addressing food insecurity, to expand and create new economic opportunities and to increase access to fresh, local produce in urban neighborhoods.

- **Application deadline is 4:00 PM on June 12, 2020**
- For questions regarding the RFR, applicants can email Rose.Arruda@mass.gov.
- Applicants are responsible to refer to the COMMBUYS link for any changes or updates to the RFR.

Direct link: www.commbuys.com/bs0/external/bidDetail.sdo?bidId=BD-20-1002-1003-001-50117&parentUrl=activeBids

File Taxes. Help Animals. Tax Deadline Extended to July 15th



Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources is encouraging Massachusetts taxpayers to help animals in need by donating to the [Massachusetts Animal Fund](http://www.mass.gov/animalfund) on Line 33f of their income tax returns for homeless animal prevention and care. The Massachusetts tax filing deadline was extended until July 15th, so taxpayers have extra time to donate to help local animals this year! Since the Fund's inception in 2014, the Mass Animal Fund has spent over \$1.6 million dollars to sterilize and vaccinate over 12,600 local animals in over 310 municipalities. The Voucher Program turns donations into a resource that local animal control officers (ACO) can utilize to get assistance for animals in their

community. The Mass Animal Fund also provides free training opportunities and support to Massachusetts ACOs so they can provide uniform enforcement of animal control laws.

Follow the Fund on Facebook (www.facebook.com/massanimalfund) and Twitter (twitter.com/line33f) for the most up-to-date information about ending animal homelessness in the Commonwealth.

Massachusetts Building – One day Opportunities to Exhibit at the Big E

Massachusetts businesses and organizations can apply to exhibit at one day events including Massachusetts Day (9/24), and Harvest New England Day (10/2) at The Big E, September 18 – October 4, 2020. The 17 day Eastern States Exposition (The Big E) in West Springfield annually attracts over 1.6 million visitors. The Massachusetts Building located on the Avenue of States provides Bay State businesses, non-profits, and other entities a platform to showcase services and sample and sell products.

All food and beverage products, hard goods and other products or services must be local. Food and fiber products must be grown, produced, or manufactured in Massachusetts, and commercially available year-round.

Single day exhibitor guidelines and applications: www.mass.gov/massachusetts-state-exposition-building-0. The application deadline is July 17, 2020.

Questions: Military Day and Massachusetts Day: Phu.Mai@mass.gov. Harvest New England Day: Bonita.Oehlke@mass.gov.

UMass Extension Introduces InsectXaminer

[A free short video series highlighting the incredible world of insects](#)

The InsectXaminer short video series hopes to increase the visibility of the beautiful world of insects, even those we consider to be pests in our managed landscapes. InsectXaminer will showcase the complexity of insect life cycles, cataloging as many life stages for each species as possible. The goal of this series is to provide professionals and land managers with footage that is helpful for learning the identification of insects throughout the season, rather than at any single point in their life cycle. Proper identification is key to successful management. If possible and caught on camera, important aspects of their biology and natural enemies will be revealed.

Join UMass Extension as we observe these incredible organisms and look into a world that, while it happens all around us, sometimes goes unseen!

One thing you don't have to worry about this spring? Gypsy moth! Thanks to the gypsy moth caterpillar killing fungus, *Entomophaga maimaiga*, the recent outbreak of this invasive insect has come to an end! Most locations in Massachusetts will not see damaging or even noticeable populations of this insect in 2020. Missing gypsy moth already? Check out Episode 1 of InsectXaminer to reminisce about the 2015-2018 outbreak of this insect!

[Episode 1 - Gypsy Moth \(*Lymantria dispar*\)](#)

Gypsy moth has been in Massachusetts since the 1860's. This invasive insect from Europe often goes unnoticed, thanks to population regulation provided by the entomopathogenic fungus, *Entomophaga maimaiga*, as well as a NPV virus specific to gypsy moth caterpillars. (And to a lesser extent many other organisms, including other insects, small mammals, and birds who feed on gypsy moth.) However, if environmental conditions do not favor the life cycle of the fungus, outbreaks of gypsy moth caterpillars are possible. (Such as most recently from 2015-2018, with a peak in the gypsy moth population in 2017 in Massachusetts.) Egg masses, caterpillars, pupae, and adults are showcased here. Certain aspects of field identification of fungus and virus infected caterpillars is also included.

Update on SBA Emergency Loan Programs

Maple syrup producers are eligible for SBA Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL). This program features a \$10,000 immediate loan advance that does not require repayment.

After consultation with congressional offices we have determined that maple syrup producers that package, wholesale and/or retail their product are qualified for this EIDL program and should not identify themselves as “agriculture” if applying (“Agriculture” is not eligible for EIDL). Maple syrup can move ahead as a production business in the application. This makes them eligible for EIDL loans.

Maple enterprises producing sap-only (and other “farming” operations) are not eligible for EIDL loans.

All farms and maple businesses can apply for the [SBA Paycheck Protection Program \(PPP\)](#).

Organic Producer Survey

The Organic Farming Research Foundation (OFRF) and Organic Seed Alliance (OSA) are collaborating with the Social and Economic Sciences Research Center (SESRC) to identify the research priorities of certified organic producers, as well as producers transitioning land to certified organic production.

During these uncertain times, it is more important than ever that farmers and ranchers make their voices heard. The surveys opened on February 18, 2020 and the deadline has been **extended from April 1, 2020 to June 1, 2020**.

Two national surveys—one for certified organic producers and the other for producers transitioning to organic certification. If you are a certified organic farmer or rancher OR a farmer or rancher who is currently transitioning to certified organic, this is an opportunity to make your voice heard.

For certified organic farmers and ranchers, please take the organic survey on our secure website at: www.opinion.wsu.edu/organicproduction/

For farmers and ranchers who are transitioning to organic certification, please take the transition survey on our secure website at: www.opinion.wsu.edu/transitionproducers/

Results will be published in updates of OFRF's National Organic Research Agenda (NORA) report and OSA's State of Organic Seed (SOS) report to provide a roadmap for future research funding. If you have any questions about the surveys, please contact Lauren Scott at sesrc.nora.survey@wsu.edu. Upon completion of the survey, you can enter to win a \$100 gift card to REI.

UPCOMING EVENTS/WORKSHOPS

Webinars on Animal Production - SEMAP partners with The Livestock Institute and Co-operative Feed Dealers to offer a series of webinars on animal production.

- **Basics of Feeding Non-Ruminants** – April 16th - 12:00 pm – 12:45 pm - semaponline.org/event/basics-of-feeding-non-ruminants
- **TMR Heating and Maintaining Feed Quality During Summer Conditions** - April 17th 12:00 - 12:30 pm - semaponline.org/event/tmr-heating
- **Fly Control on Animal Operations – IPM** - April 17th - 4:00 - 4:30 pm - semaponline.org/event/fly-control-on-animal-operations-ipm

There will be additional ones next week – Updates here: semaponline.org/events. They will all be recorded.

April 28: Invasive Plants in Longmeadow and Beyond (Virtual Program) - presentation by MDAR's environmental biologist Jennifer Forman Orth on invasive plant species affecting our community. Longmeadow has been hit with invasive plants that can ruin your gardens, damage your home, and create long-lasting problems. Learn how to identify these unwanted plants, and safely manage and eradicate them so that we can work together to limit the damage. [Register here.](#)

Save the Date: November 11 & 12 - The [Northeast Greenhouse Conference & Expo](http://www.negreenhouse.org) will be held at the Buxton Regency Hotel. This event is co-sponsored by New England Floriculture, Inc. - a group of grower representatives from the Northeast, augmented by University and Cooperative Extension staff in each state who specialize in greenhouse crops and management. Sponsor and exhibitor opportunities are available. Sponsorship pricing varies depending on level of exposure, and exhibitor pricing varies depending on booth size and location. For additional event information, please visit www.negreenhouse.org.

USDA News

DHS and USDA Move to Protect American Farmers and Ensure Continued Flow of America's Food Supply

Department to Temporarily Amend Certain H-2A Requirements During COVID-19 National Emergency

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), with the support of the USDA, has announced a temporary final rule to change certain H-2A requirements to help U.S. agricultural employers avoid disruptions in lawful agricultural-related employment, protect the nation's food supply chain, and lessen impacts from the coronavirus (COVID-19) public health emergency. These temporary flexibilities will not weaken or eliminate protections for U.S. workers.

Under this temporary final rule, an H-2A petitioner with a valid temporary labor certification who is concerned that workers will be unable to enter the country due to travel restrictions can start employing certain foreign workers who are currently in H-2A status in the United States immediately after United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) receives the H-2A petition, but no earlier than the start date of employment listed on the petition. To take advantage of this time-limited change in regulatory requirements, the H-2A worker seeking to change employers must already be in the United States and in valid H-2A status.

Additionally, USCIS is temporarily amending its regulations to protect the country's food supply chain by allowing H-2A workers to stay beyond the three-year maximum allowable period of stay in the United States. These temporary changes will encourage and facilitate the continued lawful employment of foreign temporary and seasonal agricultural workers during the COVID-19 national emergency. Agricultural employers should utilize this streamlined process if they are concerned with their ability to bring in the temporary workers who were previously authorized to work for the employer in H-2A classification. At no point is it acceptable for employers to hire illegal aliens.

The temporary final rule is effective immediately upon publication in the Federal Register. If the new petition is approved, the H-2A worker will be able to stay in the United States for a period of time not to exceed the validity period of the Temporary Labor Certification. DHS will issue a new temporary final rule in the Federal Register to amend the termination date of these new procedures in the event DHS determines that circumstances demonstrate a continued need for the temporary changes to the H-2A regulations.

The H-2A nonimmigrant classification applies to alien workers seeking to perform agricultural labor or services of a temporary or seasonal nature in the United States, usually lasting no longer than one year, for which able, willing, and qualified U.S. workers are not available.

[Complete release here.](#)

RMA Offering Remote Assistance and Authorizing Additional Flexibility for Producers

USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) is authorizing additional flexibilities due to coronavirus while continuing to support producers, working through Approved Insurance Providers (AIPs) to deliver services, including processing policies, claims and agreements. These flexibilities include: enabling producers to send notifications

and reports electronically, extending the date for production reports and providing additional time and dererring interest on premium and other payments.

Producers may send notifications and reports electronically for written agreement issues, acreage and production reporting. Notice of the policyholder's election may be provided over the phone with appropriate documentation of the call or using electronic methods followed by their confirmation of such election in writing (a signed, or esigned, form) no later than July 15, 2020.

For the 2020 crop year, AIPs may accept production reports through the earlier of the acreage reporting date (ARD) or 30 days after the production reporting date (PRD) for crops insured under the Common Crop Insurance Policy Basic Provisions with a PRD of March 15, 2020, or later. Generally, the PRD for crops insured under the Common Crop Insurance Policy Basic Provisions is the earlier of the ARD or 45 days after the cancellation date.

AIPs are authorized to provide additional time for policyholders to make payment of premium and administrative fees. Interest accrual on premium payments and administrative fees will be waived to the earliest of an additional 60 days from the scheduled payment due date or the termination date on policies with premium billing dates between March 1, 2020, and April 30, 2020. AIPs are also authorized to provide additional time for policyholders to make payment for Written Payment Agreements due between March 1, 2020, and April 30, 2020. Payments may be extended up to 60 days from the scheduled payment due date and considered a timely payment.

RMA is working with AIPs and other customers by phone, mail and electronically to continue supporting crop insurance coverage for producers. Farmers with crop insurance questions or needs should continue to contact their insurance agents about conducting business remotely (by telephone or email).

Note: The information above pertains only to crops covered by a Federal Crop Insurance policy. If you have coverage under the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) administered by the USDA – Farm Service Agency (FSA), you should contact the local FSA Office that serves your farming operation for more details. For the most current updates on available services, visit farmers.gov/coronavirus.

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is accepting applications from state and local governments, non-governmental organizations and Native American Tribes that would like to protect working farmland through an Agricultural Land Easement under the federal Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP).

ACEP Agricultural Land Easements protect critical natural resources and encourage private landowners to maintain land for farming through the voluntary sale of an easement, which limits future development.

NRCS provides financial assistance to eligible partners for purchasing Agricultural Land Easements. Cropland, rangeland, grassland, pastureland and industrial private forest land private forestland are eligible. State and local governments, non-governmental organizations and Native American Tribes that have farmland or grassland protection programs are eligible to partner with NRCS to purchase conservation easements.

This year's application ranking date is Friday, May 1, 2020. All eligible applications received by 4:00 pm on this date will be ranked. The highest ranked applications will be selected based on the available funds provide to Massachusetts NRCS.

To apply, applications should be submitted to Helen Castles, USDA-NRCS Massachusetts State Office, 451 West Street, Amherst, MA 01002 by Friday, May 1, 2020. [More here.](#)

Classified

- **Seeking Sustainable Farmer for Long-term Lease of North Shore Farm** - Essex County Greenbelt Association is seeking a farmer to enter into a long-term ground lease agreement on a 60-acre farm (20ac tillable) in Hamilton & Topsfield, Massachusetts. High-visibility location, adjacent to the Ipswich River; strong preference for sustainable growing practices and applicants without secure farmland access. RFP Due Sept. 15, 2020. For details and RFP, see www.ecga.org/GreenMeadowsFarmRFP.
- **[Sweetfern \(Comptonia peregrina\)](#)** - Best for naturalizing and mass plantings in sunny sites where “normal” landscape plants tend to perform poorly, like parking lots and along roadways. Solid root system fixes nitrogen, holds the soil effectively, helps prevent erosion on bankings/steep slopes, thrives in impoverished soils. Hundreds now ready in #1 (6”) pots. Hopkinton pickup only. Call/email Wayne for prices: 508-962-1857, waynem@westonnurseries.com.
- **Meatworks** - Designed with the highest animal welfare and humane handling standards in mind, Meatworks is a state of the art slaughter facility available to small-scale livestock producers in Southern New England. Committed to working with local farms to keep a steady supply of fresh, sustainably raised meats available to our communities, at reasonable prices. Please book your processing date today by calling 774-319-5616. For more information, visit www.meatworkswestport.com.

About the *Farm & Market Report*

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<u>Boston Office:</u> 251 Causeway St., Suite 500, Boston, MA 02114-2151 617-626-1700	<u>West Springfield:</u> 138 Memorial Avenue, Suite 42 West Springfield, MA 01089	<u>Lakeville:</u> 30 Riverside Drive, Suite 202, Lakeville, MA 02347 774-419-1800
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- John Lebeaux, Commissioner, John.Lebeaux@mass.gov
- Ashley Sears Randle, Deputy Commissioner/Policy & Legislative Affairs Ashley.Randle@mass.gov
- Alisha Bouchard, Deputy Commissioner/Chief of Staff, Alisha.Bouchard@mass.gov
- Margaret Callanan, General Counsel, Margaret.Callanan@mass.gov
- Cullen Roberts, Chief Financial Officer, Administration, Cullen.Roberts2@mass.gov

Division Directors

- Michael Cahill, Director of Animal Health, Michael.Cahill@mass.gov
- Mary Jordan, Director of Agricultural Markets, Mary.Jordan@mass.gov
- Gerard Kennedy, Director of Agricultural Conservation and Technical Assistance, Gerard.Kennedy@mass.gov
- Taryn LaScola-Miner, Director of Crop and Pest Services (C&PS) Division, Taryn.LaScola@mass.gov
- Michael Botelho, Director of Produce Safety, Michael.Botelho@mass.gov

Complete start directory [here](#). Next issue to be published in June. Please send news, events, or classified information by June 1st to Richard.LeBlanc@mass.gov. To unsubscribe, or change your email address, contact Richard.LeBlanc@mass.gov or call 617-626-1759.

COVID-19 Resources for Agriculture

MassGrown: COVID-19: How & Where to Buy Local

MDAR's mission is to ensure the long-term viability of agriculture in Massachusetts. Through its four divisions – Agricultural Conservation & Technical Assistance, Agricultural Markets, Animal Health, and Crop and Pest Services – MDAR strives to support, regulate and enhance the rich diversity of the Commonwealth's agricultural community to promote economically and environmentally sound food safety and animal health measures, and fulfill agriculture's role in energy conservation and production. For more information, visit MDAR's website at www.mass.gov/agr.

